13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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a late Neolithic burial cairn at Lyles Hill near Belfast I found tens of thousands of potsherds which had been collected from domestic refuse and thrown into the cairn during the course of its erection.[1] The broken plates which may be seen exposed on the graves in some old burial-grounds in Co. Mayo are probably placed there in continuation of ancient practice. The breaking of pots is one of the elements in Hallowe'en pranks—one might almost say rites—and again we notice the association with the dead, for All-Hallows is the time when the dead are believed to return to their homes.

It would appear that by breaking a pot you broke its spirit; and by transference the power of the dead to do harm. Readers will recall the significant lines from *Hamlet*, referring to the suicide of Ophelia: 'Her death was doubtful . . . for charitable prayers, shards, flints and pebbles should be thrown on her.'[2] In some places in south-west England potsherds figure in the 'lent crocking' rites at Easter: like Easter eggs they are symbols of fertility. The association of fertility and decay, of life and death, comedy and tragedy, is clearly displayed in the wake games which are described in Chapter XX. This association, we note in passing, is ever-present in the mind of the Irish countryman, and the juxtaposition gives dramatic quality to the work of many Anglo-Irish playwrights.

This is not the place to enlarge on the technology of early pot-making, but it may be observed that the designs, fabric and finish of the Neolithic family of pottery in Ireland were far superior to those of succeeding periods: indeed it was not until wheel-made pots found local markets in the medieval towns that technically superior vessels were made in this country. In late prehistoric and early historic times the wealthy were able to import fine wares in small quantities from the continent, but the peasant homes over most of Ireland apparently did without pottery—the Gaelic word for potter is a loan-word—and vessels of wood, metal or leather did duty for the now universal imported 'delph'. The Dutchman, Gerard Boate, writing in 1645, said that 'the use of earthen vessels hath been very rare among them, and to the most part unknown even

[1] E. E. Evans, *Lyles Hill: a late Neolithic site in Co. Antrim*, H.M.S.O. (1953).
[2] *Hamlet*, Act V, Sc. 1.

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

times are recognized as recently deceased islanders, but more often they are "strangers" from another generation or another region of Ireland. They appear and disappear without warning and travel silently singly or in small groups. Usually they pay little or no heed to the living who chance to observe them, but they will attack those who have wronged them and occasionally others for seemingly no reason. A man told me of being beaten severely by three unknown men, obviously shades, early one evening at the back of the island; he might have been killed but for the intervention of two women, also strangers to him. At one time, persons who feared being assaulted by vengeful or capricious ghosts carried coals to protect themselves. The folk believe that shades are souls of the dead in Purgatory, which embraces the earth as well as a spiritual locus. While on earth, they do penance by laboring at economic tasks—carrying seaweed, planting gardens, and fishing—near their former homes, and the work that they accomplish is undone once they disappear.

Christianity touches on the evil eye in more ways than providing the magical incantation, "God bless you.", which automatically opposes the power of God to that of the witch. Many islanders explain the evil eye by positing the presence of both the deity and the Devil in each human body. God rests on the right side and urges a person to do good deeds, while Satan rests on the left and tempts him to commit sins. In most individuals, the deity dominates the body much of the time, but in the case of one with the evil eye, the Devil somehow has gained perpetual ascendancy and transmits his destructive power through the left eye of the person. It is the constant flowing of malignant power from within which causes the disfigurement in or near the left eye of the witch. The association of evil with the left is a phenomenon widely distributed among the peoples of the world, as is the linking of evil with black. Ghost masks are painted black to symbolize their evil nature by the Anang of Nigeria, and sacrifices to deity and ancestors at shrines are made with the right hand, and to ghosts, witches, and the spirit of sorcery with the left. In Inis Beag, people who have swarthy skin, black hair, and brown eyes, although not considered witches, are thought to possess evil power of some sort and are to be avoided. A curate possessing these physical traits who served in the island recently was mistrusted and shunned whenever possible even though "a man chosen by God Almighty." An interesting conjecture is how successful would be the research in Inis Beag of an anthropologist with dark complexion and hair and a cast in his brown left eye.

The afterworld of the Celts, known as the Isle of the Blest or the Land of Youth, lay to the west of Ireland. It has been sighted by a few fortunate Inis Beag fishermen, either low-lying on the horizon with lights sparkling when it has risen from the sea, as it does periodically, or in the ocean deeps with the spires of its buildings and their tolling bells near the surface. This is a forested land inhabited by souls of the dead, and by fairies who travel to and from the mainland in "fairy ships." Few islanders now syncretize the Isle of the Blest with the Christian Heaven, as was common a century ago, but there are those who claim to have seen fairy ships from there skirt Inis Beag headed for the mainland. These are masted schooners carrying lights with no signs of life on their decks, which heave into sight and vanish instantaneously and can move far more swiftly than their counter-

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

parts fashioned by human hands. A valley in Inis Thiar is believed to have been created by such a ship passing over the island, "with a great roar and blowing of wind." According to Celtic tradition, souls not only transmigrated to the Land of Youth but became reincarnated on earth or embodied in animals through metempsychosis. The belief in reincarnation appears not to have persisted in Inis Beag, but seals sometimes are thought to be repositories of souls; those creatures so possessed look and act human and attach themselves to fishermen who have aided or harmed them, and whose *curach* they will pursue relentlessly. I was told by an old man of a seal that he had cursed at sea for fouling his net, which later followed in his wake for many miles glaring with rage, and finally pursued him 30 feet onto the strand as he and his frightened mates carried the canoe hurriedly to its cot.

Religion and Personality

It is appropriate here to assess the basic personality structure of Inis Beag islanders, since traits such as sexual puritanism, hypochondria, depression, masochism, conformism, and ambivalence toward authority are linked causally with religion in a very direct manner. Other personality characteristics, already or yet to be considered, which are more peripheral to religion include secretiveness, envy and jealousy, dogmatism, indolence, feelings of inferiority, and verbal skill.

Probably the most prominent trait of Inis Beag (and Irish) personality is sexual puritanism. Its etiology is complex and much debated, but appears to embrace most significantly historical (such as the influence of ascetic monasticism and Jansenism), sociocultural (such as the Oedipus complex and male solidarity), and psychological (such as masochism) variables. How long it has been a major component of Irish national character is conjectural, for it is impossible to appraise with accuracy Irish society, culture, and personality prior to the nineteenth century. Sexual attitudes and behavior in Celtic, medieval, and early modern times can be surmised only from tangential and questionable sources; depending on which sources are quoted, as good a case can be made for sexual puritanism as its opposite before 1800.

The inculcation of sexual puritanism in Inis Beag must be examined in three contexts: informal social controls of the curate and those imposed by the islanders on themselves, the influence of visiting "missions," and enculturation in the home. The first of these has been taken up at length in the last chapter. Suffice it to say here, some folk (especially certain youths who consider themselves "worldly") resent the intrusions of priests and neighbors into their sexual lives. They ask what right have young, virginal, inexperienced, and sexually unknowledgeable curates to give advice and pass judgments in this sphere. Equally resented are those persons who hide themselves in the darkness or behind fences to overhear the conversations of passersby, which may pertain to sexual matters, and those who maintain close scrutiny of visitors during the summer, both day and night, in order to discover them in "compromising" situations. Sexual rumors run rife in the island, such as those concerning the "nude" sunbathing of mainland girls (bared shoulders and lower thighs) and the "attacks" on them at night by